

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01  
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R 081601Z MAY 78  
FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1029  
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS  
AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD POUCH  
AMEMBASSY LONDON POUCH  
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW POUCH  
AMEMBASSY PARIS  
AMEMBASSY RABAT  
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI  
CINCUSNAVEUR  
COMSIXTHFLT  
EUCOM  
USDOCOSOUTH

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 TUNIS 3339

EUCOM AND CINCUSNAVEUR ALSO FOR POLADS  
USDOCOSOUTH FOR INTAF

E. O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT TS  
SUBJ: TUNISIAN PREMIER DISCUSSES DOMESTIC SCENE

1. SUMMARY: HEDI NOUIRA SPOKE TO ME AT LENGTH AND DEFENSIVELY REGARDING WHAT HE CONSIDERS UNFAIR CURRENT FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC CRITICISM OF THE SYSTEM ERECTED BY THE DESTOURIAN SOCIALIST PARTY. HE ANALYZED VARIOUS ATTITUDES AMONG TUNISIAN YOUTH AND STRESSED THE DANGERS IN THEIR GROWING ADHERENCE TO BAATHISM AND ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM. HE DEFENDED TUNISIAN DEMOCRACY, OPENNESS TO OUTSIDE INFORMATION.  
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FLUENCES ANTLBIBERATION OF ITS WOMEN. HE PLEADED FOR HIS CRITICS TO LOOK AT WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED HERE, NOT BY OTHER YARDSTICKS, BUT BY MEASURING IT AGAINST ITS PAST AND AGAINST THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF OTHER ARAB STATES (OTHER ITEMS REPORTED IN SEPTELS, NOTAL.) END SUMMARY.

2. DURING MY FORTY-MINUTE WAIT TO SEE PRIME MINISTER MOUIRA MAY 6, HE CAME INTO HIS CHEF DE CABINET'S OFFICE TO APOLOGIZE FOR HOLDING ME UP, EXPLAINING THAT HE WAS IN A RATHER ROUGH SESSION WITH A GROUP OF FRENCH TV JOURNALISTS (CHAINE 2) AND OFFERED TO SET ANOTHER APPOINTMENT IF I COULD NOT WAIT. I ASSURED HIM I WAS CONTENT TO WAIT IN A WORTHY CAUSE.

3. FOREIGN CRITICISM: WHEN WE WERE ALONE, I BEGAN BY SAYING I HAD LUNCHEDED THE PREVIOUS DAY WITH WASHINGTON POST COLUMNIST JUST AFTER NOUIRA HAD GIVEN HIM AN INTERVIEW WITH WHICH CLAYTON FRITCHEY HAD BEEN QUITE PLEASED. AS A MATTER OF FACT, I SAID, I WAS HAPPY TO NOTE HOW MUCH TIME HE HAD BEEN GIVING LATELY TO FOREIGN JOURNALISTS, EXPLAINING HIS GOVERNMENT'S POINT OF VIEW. I TOLD MOUIRA THAT I HAD TO SAY, IN ALL FRANKNESS, THAT I FELT THE GOT WAS LOSING THE BATTLE FOR UNDERSTANDING IN THE FOREIGN PRESS, ESPECIALLY OVER THE HANDLING OF THE IMPRISONED UGTT LEADERSHIP. YES, HE SAID WITH A RESIGNED SIGH, THEN ASKED, "WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH JOURNALISTS AND PEOPLE FROM ORGANIZATIONS LIKE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL AND ALL THESE LAWYERS SENT HERE BY FOREIGN LABOR UNIONS WHO SPEND TWO DAYS HERE? THEY COME WITH PRECONCEPTIONS AND DON'T EVEN KNOW THE RIGHT QUESTIONS TO ASK." SOME OF THEM, LIKE THE FRENCH TV JOURNALISTS HE HAD JUST SEEN, ACCUSED HIM OF TURNING TUNISIA INTO

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A FASCIST STATE.

4. NOUIRA SAID HE USUALLY ASKS THEM BY WHOSE STANDARDS DO THEY JUDGE US. BY FRENCH STANDARDS? WHAT FRENCH STANDARDS? COMPARE THE LOT OF THE TUNISIAN TODAY WITH WHAT IT WAS ONLY TWENTY-THREE YEARS AGO UNDER THE FRENCH\* IN TUNISIA TODAY A MAN IS FREE TO DO WHAT HE WANTS, TO GO AS FAR AS HE LIKES, TO LIVE WHERE HE LIKES, TO CHOOSE HIS OCCUPATION, TO GO ON STRIKE, TO CRITICIZE THE GOVERNMENT, ETC. NO ONE IS IN PRISON HERE TODAY FOR SPEAKING HIS MIND. ADMITTEDLY MUCH REMAINS TO BE DONE IN TUNISIA, BUT THE DESTOURIAN PHILOSOPHY IS BASED UPON THE DIGNITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND HIS PERFECTIBILITY. IT IS HARD FOR HIM AND HIS GOVERNMENT TO STOMACH THE UNFAIR CRITICISM IT IS RECEIVING FROM MANY QUARTERS. HE TICKED OFF A LIST OF FRENCH PUBLICATIONS, INCLUDING L'HUMANITE, WHO CRITICIZE HIS POLICIES, AND SAID "WE SIMPLY DO NOT WANT THE KIND OF SOCIETY THEY ESPOUSE. WE HAVE LIVED OUR OWN UNIQUE HISTORY HERE FOR 3000 YEARS. WE HAVE OUR OWN HISTORY TO MAKE AND TO LIVE AND IT WILL NOT, PLEASE GOD, INCLUDE EITHER A FASCIST OR COMMUNIST FUTURE."

5. CONTRAST WITH IRAQ: AS A PARTICULARLY GALLING  
EXAMPLE OF CURRENT CRITICISM, HE CITED THAT OF THE  
BAATHIST IRAQI, TAIEB LAHDHIRI, WHO HEADS ICATU, WHO  
WAS RECENTLY HERE AT A LABOR CONGRESS AND WHO DEMANDED  
AN INTERVIEW WITH HIM. NOUIRA SENT HIM A REPLY SAYING  
HE WOULD BE HAPPY TO RECEIVE HIM WHILE HE WAS IN TUNIS  
IF HE WOULD FIRST INFORM HIM OF THE WHEREABOUTS OF FOUR  
FORMER IRAQI LABOR LEADERS WHOM HE HAD KNOWN AND WHOSE  
NAMES HE APPENDED ON A LIST. NOUIRA SAID HE WAS SURE  
THEY WERE ALL DEAD. THEN HE TOLD OF AN OFFICIAL VISIT  
HE HAD MADE TO IRAQ WHERE POLICE OR MILITARY ARE PRESENT  
AT ALL TIMES IN FACTORIES, PLACES OF BUSINESS, PUBLIC  
INSTITUTIONS. THIS IS NO POLICE STATE, AND WE WILL  
NOT LET IT BECOME ONE, HE SAID, BUT WE WILL DEFEND  
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WHAT WE HAVE BUILT HERE.

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INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15

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FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

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6. CONTRAST WITH LIBYA: AS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF MIS-  
GUIDED CRITICISM HE TOLD OF A CONVERSATION WITH MAJOR  
ABDELJELIL JALLUD, LIBYAN PRIME MINISTER, WHO HAD THE  
TEMERITY ONCE TO TELL HIM TUNISIANS WERE "MORALLY  
ROOTLESS" BECAUSE THEY NIXED FRENCH WITH THEIR ARABIC,  
STUDIED SO MUCH FRENCH IN THEIR SCHOOLS AND PUT UP  
PUBLIC SIGNS IN FRENCH. HE SUGGESTED TUNISIAN YOUTHS  
WOULD BENEFIT BY TAKING COURSES IN LIBYAN INSTITUTIONS\*  
NOUIRA ASKED IF TUNISIAN GIRLS WOULD BE INVITED ON  
EQUAL TERMS. NO, SAID JALLUD, THE KORAN DOES NOT  
TOLERATE EQUALITY OF THE SEXES. TUNISIA WAS WRONG TO  
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DEPART FROM KORANIC PRINCIPLES REGARDING THE STATUS OF  
WOMEN AND DIVORCE. NOUIRA SAID HE THEN INVITED JALLUD  
TO COME TO ANOTHER ROOM AND PUT HIS FIFTEEN YEAR OLD  
SON TO THE TEST; HE WOULD FIND HE SPOKE, READ AND WROTE  
ARABIC BETTER THAN JALLUD. AFTER JALLUD DECLINED THE  
ENCOUNTER, NOUIRA REVIEWED TUNISIAN HISTORY WITH HIM,  
POINTING OUT THAT THE COUNTRY HAD LIVED SIX CENTURIES  
UNDER THE CARTHAGINIANS, SIX CENTURIES UNDER THE ROMANS,  
NEARLY THREE UNDER THE TURKS HAD RULED (FROM KAIROUAN)  
SICILY, ALL OF NORTH AFRICA AND MOST OF SPAIN, PRODUCED  
GREAT PHILOSOPHERS, THEOLOGIANS, SCIENTISTS AND POETS,  
BUT HAD BEEN UNDER THE FRENCH YOKE LESS THAN THREE  
GENERATIONS. TUNISIAN CULTURE, HE STATED, REPRESENTS  
SOMETHING BORROWED FROM ALL THE CULTURES WITH WHICH IT  
HAD COME IN CONTACT. TUNISIA COULD NEVER GO BACK TO  
MODELING ITSELF, AS LIBYA IS TRYING TO DO, SOLELY ON  
ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM.

7. ATTITUDES OF YOUTH: CRITICISM COMES TOO, THE PRIME  
MINISTER CONTINUED, FROM TUNISIAN YOUNG MEN "WHO MOSTLY  
WEAR LONG HAIR AND BEARDS" AND YOUNG GIRLS "WHO LOOK  
LIKE MOSAICS OF ST. MONICA," WHO HAVE STUDIED IN FRANCE  
AND COME BACK AND TELL HIM HE MUST PUSH THE ARABIZATION  
OF TUNISIAN EDUCATION FASTER, THAT THE SCIENCES SHOULD  
BE TAUGHT IN ARABIC, NOUIRA RESPONDS THAT HE FAVORS  
INCREASED ARABIZATION BUT ONLY TO A POINT. WHAT SCIENTI-  
FIC WORKS ARE BEING WRITTEN IN ARABIC, HE ASKS THEM.  
"DO YOU WANT TO MAKE A WHOLE RACE OF TRANSLATORS INTO  
THE KEY PEOPLE IN TUNISIAN EDUCATION? ISN'T IT BETTER  
TO TEACH OUR SCIENTISTS TO STUDY SCIENTIFIC WORKS IN  
THEIR ORIGINAL ENGLISH, GERMAN AND FRENCH? HOW ELSE CAN  
THEY COMMUNICATE WITH THESE SCIENTISTS AND STUDY UNDER

THEM?" THE MOST SALUTARY THING WE CAN DO FOR SUCH YOUNG  
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PEOPLE IS TO SEND THEM ON A TOUR OF THE EASTERN ARAB  
COUNTRIES. ALL WHO GO THERE COME BACK IMPRESSED WITH  
TUNISIA AND MORE READY TO BE THANKFUL FOR WHAT THEY  
FIND HERE, HE SAID.

8. AMONG TUNISIAN YOUTH, NOUIRA WENT ON TO A THEME HE  
HAD MENTIONED TO ME PREVIOUSLY, THE GREATEST DANGER HE  
SEES IS A GROWTH OF ATTRACTION FOR THE DOCTRINES OF THE  
BAATHISTS AND THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD. THEY ARE LISTEN-  
ING TO A HANDFUL OF SHEIKHS WHO PREACH ISLAMIC FUNDA-  
MENTALISM WHICH COULD TRANSLATE ITSELF SO EASILY INTO  
XENOPHOBIA, INTOLERANCE OF OTHER CULTURES, REACTION AND  
AUTHORITARIANISM. ITS ACCEPTANCE WOULD NEGATE TUNISIA'S  
FINEST ACHIEVEMENTS. WE WILL NEVER PUT THESE TEACHERS  
IN JAIL, HE SAID, BUT WE HAVE TO COUNTER THEIR INFLUENCE  
IN OUR SCHOOLS. WHAT HE PERSONALLY HOPES IS THAT TUNISIA  
CAN "EDUCATE ONE MORE GENERATION IN CARTESIAN WAYS OF  
THINKING AND REASONING, ONE MORE GENERATION, THEN WE  
WILL NEVER NEED TO FEAR RETROGRESSION".

9. TUNISIA'S UNIQUENESS: AS IT IS, CONCLUDED THE PRIME  
MINISTER, WE ARE ALREADY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER ARABS; WE  
ARE DIFFERENT FROM OUR NEIGHBORS HERE IN THE MAGHREB.  
THERE CAN ALREADY BE SAID TO BE A UNIQUENESS TO TUNISIANS.  
TUNISIANS, UNLIKE ALGERIANS AND LIBYANS, HAVE NO "IDENTITY  
CRISIS." WE ARE NOT RICH, HE SAID, BUT WE HAVE MANAGED  
WELL WHAT LITTLE WE HAVE. RECENTLY, AFTER A WEEK IN  
SAUDI ARABIA, HE HAD GIVEN PRINCE FAHD HIS FRANK EVALUA-  
TION THAT "YOU ARE RICH BUT YOU ARE UNDERDEVELOPED; WE  
ARE POOR BUT WE ARE FURTHER DEVELOPED THAN YOU ARE."  
(THIS WAS IN THE COURSE OF A TALK ON THE AVAILABILITY  
OF TUNISIAN SCIENTISTS, MANAGEMENT SPECIALISTS, BANKERS  
AND TEACHERS TO MEET SAUDI NEEDS.) HE SAID FAHD TOOK  
HIS OBSERVATION KINDLY IN THE SPIRIT IN WHICH IT WAS  
GIVEN, ADMITTING THAT SAUDI ARABIA STILL HAS TO "BUY"  
EXPERTISE IN ALMOST EVERY FIELD. TUNISIA UNDENIABLY HAS  
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ITS PROBLEMS, NOUIRA SAID IN CONCLUSION, BUT IT IS SOLVING  
THEM IN REALISTIC WAYS. HE JUST WISHED THAT TUNISIA'S  
CRITICS WOULD COME HERE, TRAVEL FREELY WITHOUT HINDRANCE,  
TALK WITH PEOPLE IN ALL WALKS OF LIFE, LEARN SOMETHING  
OF TUNISIA'S HISTORICAL, CULTURAL, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC

ACHIEVEMENTS BEFORE MAKING SNAP JUDGEMENTS.

10. COMMENT: I HASTEN TO POINT OUT THAT THIS WAS NO MONOLOGUE; HOWEVER, ON LOOKING OVER MY NOTES, I DECIDED THAT I HAD HAD THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING EXPOSED TO THE ESSENTIAL NOUIRA. I HAVE FELT IT BEST TO SET DOWN AT SOME LENGTH HIS VIEWS ON SEVERAL IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF HIS THINKING. HE IS, AFTER ALL, THE MAN WHO GUIDES THIS UNIQUE LITTLE COUNTRY'S FATE MORE THAN ANY OTHER AT THIS MOMENT IN HISTORY AND WHO, WHEN BOURGUIBA PASSES, IS LIKELY TO HAVE THE REINS FULLY IN HIS HANDS FOR SOME TIME.

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11. I HAD PLANNED TO FOLLOW UP ON OPENING REMARK ABOUT THE GOT'S COMING OFF SECOND-BEST IN THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS WITH AN EXPRESSION OF MY CONCERN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ASPECTS OF THE GOT VERSUS THE UGTT LEADERSHIP, BUT NOUIRA SEEMED TO SENSE MY INTENT AND WENT ON THE DEFENSIVE.

INDEED, HIS PRESENTATION WAS ALMOST ENTIRELY DEFENSIVE, BUT RATHER PROUDLY SO. MY NOTES INDICATE THAT HE SPOKE TO ME SEVERAL TIMES " AS A MAN WHO HAS KNOWN US FOR HALF OF OUR INDEPENDENT HISTORY", "AS ONE WHO UNDERSTANDS WHAT OUR PAST WAS". THEY ALSO INDICATE THAT I MADE SUCH REMARKS IN ADDITION TO THOSE NOTED ABOVE AS THE  
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FOLLOWING:

--TUNISIA HAS A GOOD STORY TO TELL, BUT YOUR CRITICS' VOICES SEEM LOUDER THAN YOURS NOW.  
--YOU PROBABLY ALREADY HAVE, RELATIVE TO THE TOTAL POPULATION, THE LARGEST MIDDLE-CLASS IN THE ARAB WORLD, CERTAINLY THE LARGEST IN AFRICA.  
--THE BEST THING ABOUT TUNISIAN YOUTH, EVEN WHEN EDUCATED OVERSEAS, IS THAT THEY ALMOST ALWAYS COME BACK. YOU DO NOT SEEM TO HAVE A "BRAIN-DRAIN" PROBLEM OF ANY MAGNITUDE.  
--WHEN THE YOUNG OFFICERS AT THE FSI ARABIC LANGUAGE SCHOOL HER RETURN FROM TRAVELS IN THE MASHREK THEY INVARIABLY EXPRESS THEIR APPRECIATION FOR THE TUNISIAN ZATMOSPHERE.  
--AS YOU HAVE SAID MANY TIMES, THE TUNISIANS ARE AS MUCH A MEDITERRANEAN PEOPLE AS THEY ARE AN ARAB PEOPLE THEY ARE DIFFERENT.  
--I SUPPOSE ONE OF THE REASONS WE VALUE TUNISIA MOST IS THAT YOU HAVE THE ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND THE WESTERN AS WELL AS THE ARAB MIND; YOU HAVE NO IDENTITY PROBLEM.  
--PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA ADVISED DAVID ROCKEFELLER LAST YEAR (WHILE EN ROUTE TO EGYPT) IN MY PRESENCE TO TELL PRESIDENT SADAT THAT HE COULD SOLVE HIS GREATEST PROBLEM BY (A) ABOLISHING POLYGAMY AS HE HAD DONE IN TUNISIA AND BY (B) COMING TO SEE HOW TUNISIA CONDUCTED ITS FAMILY-PLANNING CAMPAIGN.  
--I SHOULD IMAGINE THAT IN A PLEBESCENT AT LEAST THREE-QUARTERS OF THE TUNISIANS WOULD OPPOSE A MERGER ON QADHAFI'S TERMS: THE WOMEN PLUS MOST OF THE MALE POPULATION WHO LIKE THE GIRLS HERE AS THEY ARE, PRETTY, LIBERATED AND WITHOUT VEILS.  
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--I TELL AMERICAN VISITORS, CONGRESSIONAL AND OTHERWISE, THAT I BELIEVE TUNISIA WILL EMERGE FROM ITS CURRENT PROBLEMS WELL, ON THE BASIS OF ITS PAST RECORD,

BY DEMONSTRATING A NATIONAL SPIRIT OF PRAGMATISM, ADAPTION  
AND COMPROMISE.

12. MUCH OF THE ABOVE WAS UNDOUBTEDLY COLORED BY  
NOUIRA'S THOUGHTS AT THE TOP OF HIS HEAD AFTER HIS  
SESSION WITH A GROUP OF HOSTILE JOURNALISTS AND MY  
OPENING REMARKS, BUT I CONSIDER THIS SUMMARY OF FIFTY  
MINUTES OF HIS PHILOSOPHIZING WORTH PUTTING ON THE  
RECORD.  
MULCAHY

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